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ABSTRACT-

In various of the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia local language candidates are appearing to claim the role of national and official languages. These languages, indigenous to the general area where they are used, such as Swahili in East Africa, are being actively promoted to assume a more important place in the linguistic life of the nation, a growth of importance which will no doubt be accompanied by a reduction in the use and importance, within national boundaries, of English. Experience elsewhere indicates that if this neglect occurs, it will likely be followed by a period of increased interest as English ceases to be a competitive threat and assumes a new role as an important foreign language of wider communication. (Author)

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TRENDS IN ENGLISH ABROAD

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We are of course aware that the English language serves needs beyond those of communication for some 300,000,000 of its native speakers.[1] At least another 300,000,000 use it regularly as a second language or are able to communicate in English when the need arises.[2] This is an estimated total of 600,000,000 people, approximately one fourth of the world's population spread widely in all parts of the globe, making English the most useful of the world's languages of wider communication. It was typical, but nonetheless noteworthy, that English was the language of the proceedings of the 1955 Bandung Conference, in which twenty-nine countries of Africa and Asia (in none of which was English native to their inhabitants) represented 1,400,000,000 people (Barnett, 1964, p. 8). The same pattern has been followed in numerous other international conferences.

This preeminence of the English language is in large part an accident of history, a consequence of the political situation in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in Europe. The position of English as the world's paramount international language may not be permanent. Indeed history has witnessed many changes in the patterns of assignment to the role of international language. At one time English was relatively insignificant; in the words of Richard Mulcaster, an eminent sixteenth century London educator, English was a "tongue of small reach, stretching no further than this island, and not there over all."[3] Indeed the English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon wrote in 1620 in his Novum Organum that when men were better educated the English language would be obsolete.[4]

English does have staying power that would surprise Mulcaster and Bacon, and its pertinacity is greatly enhanced by the fact that a fantastically tremendous amount of the knowledge mankind has amassed is available in English, either because English was the language of original publication or because English was an attractive medium for translation. Macaulay was simply stating the facts about English when he wrote in 1835 that "whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded."[5] Today, 135 years later, the knowledge available in English has increased many times, almost by an exponential factor. Any man, or for that matter any nation, that aspires to an awareness of the world, will find English unexcelled as a medium to gain and retrieve information. Not only in education but in daily life, English is important. More than 70 percent of the world's mail is written and addressed in English, and more than 60 percent of the world's radio programs are in English (Barnett, 1964, p. 7). In addition, virtually every capital city in Asia and Africa (excepting former French colonies) has an English language newspaper, often the leading paper of the country.

When one considers the role of the preeminent language of wider communication in conjunction with the explosive rate of technological change that is literally inundating the world with new knowledge and information,

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the advantage of a highly developed and functioning language can be appreciated. Technology feeds on itself, so that the rate of change, which language must keep pace with, is ever increasing. A man living today will see a doubling of everything newly made on the earth each fifteen years, so that within a 75-year life-span a person will witness this doubling five times. Ninety percent of the scientists who ever lived are still alive today, and they are producing torrents of information that must be encoded in a language, published, diffused, and applied (Toffler, 1970, p. 27). The number of scientific journals and the amount of scientific publication, like the other products of our society, doubles every fifteen years. English is presently the most efficient language in which this recording and diffusion can be accomplished.

English is not, however, without competition as a means of communication, especially in countries that have won their independence near the midpoint of the present century. Nationalism has its linguistic expression, and many countries rightly feel that an indigenous tongue is preferable as a vehicle of communication within a country. Manuel Quezon, first president of the Republic of the Philippines, expressed public regret that he could address all of his countrymen only in a foreign tongue. Today the Philippines is the scene of a vigorous campaign to develop a national language, Pilipino, based on a language indigenous to the Islands: Tagalog. Analogues of this effort are evident in other countries, particularly in Malaysia, Indonesia, Israel, Tanzania, Ireland, Pakistan, India, and Ceylon. In the last two countries the question of which local language to designate as official has been the immediate cause of bloody riots. India tried by constitutional mandate to name the day when Hindi would completely replace English as the official language (the 1950 constitution specified 1965 as the date when English would be discontinued), but was forced to reconsider when it became evident that the switchover was not feasible, that the entire national budget would not be adequate to implement the proposal. In making the announcement that English would continue for an indefinite period as an "associate official language," Nehru termed English "the major window to the outside world" and added it would be perilous to close that window (Barnett, 1964, p. 5). Gokak (1964, p. 5) reports that in a speech to the all-India Punjabi Conference in 1961, Prime Minister Nehru employed the "window on the world" figure: "All regional languages must be developed and promoted. But that did not mean that English should be discarded. To do that would amount to closing a window on the world of technology . . . Foreign languages served as a window on it and to suppose that translations could take their place was a mistake . . . It was no use getting into an intellectual prison after achieving political independence."

Granting the motivations to retain English, the aspiration for an indigenous national language is so strong that some countries place its development high on the list of national priorities, and assign scarce resources to tasks of language engineering. An enlightening account of efforts in East Africa is presented by Whiteley (1969, pp. 85-87), which involves the composition of dictionaries and grammars, provision for an enlarged vocabulary, the selection and cultivation of standard forms from a range of dialect possibilities, and encouragement for use in as many phases of the national life as the language can fulfill.

Those of us who are interested in the teaching of English for use as a world language must be aware of the legitimate claim of national languages and be prepared to accept their roles and functions. We have seen that in some countries English has served the needs of national communication, usually in the absence of viable alternatives or because English was a neutral outsider not directly participating in the competition of local groups or tribes for political (and, in consequence, linguistic) supremacy.[6] In many of the developing countries indigenous languages are appearing or will shortly appear to challenge on home grounds the exclusive use of English as an official language. Clifford Prator accurately describes the present situation:

> In one developing country after another the government is making strenuous efforts to establish an indigenous language (Filipino, Bahasa Indonesia, Malay, Hindi, Sinhalese, Arabic, Swahili, etc.) as the preferred medium of communication within the national boundaries. As more and more attempts are successful, the importance of English and French will increasingly reside in their usefulness as channels to the outside world.[7]

Of particular interest is the form which the transition of English from official to foreign language may take. Where the use of a local language is strongly advocated, the transition can be quite sudden. This has been true in India and Malaysia, where vigorous official support has been applied to the changeover.

But even where English was not an official language, but occupied the position of favored foreign language, political considerations can determine language policy decisions. An example of an abrupt change of this kind was seen in Egypt in 1950, when the treaty of 1936 between Egypt and England was cancelled and hostilities followed. The number of class periods for English in Egyptian secondary schools was reduced from eight to six, and the pass point on the English test in the very tough school leaving examination was lowered from 50 percent to 40. In 1956, after the Suez crisis, the staffs of the English-medium schools were Egyptianized. The percentage of native English-speaking teachers in these schools dropped from over 90 percent in 1950 to almost zero after 1956 as expatriate teachers were expelled. The action of deemphasizing English in the curriculum and in the school leaving examination was unopposed by local educators, because it was felt that, especially in the private schools, English had been overemphasized before 1950 at the expense of Arabic; thus reducing the role of English was an overdue correction in the cirriculum. English was in effect made an elective in the secondary school diploma program, since a student with a fail in English could still pass the examination. Thus students could enter the university without having any effective command of English.

The result after a few years was a marked deterioration in the proficiency level in English of students entering the universities. This was recognized as undesirable, particularly in the English-medium higher level science schools, and in the early 1960's an attempt was made to upgrade secondary-school instruction by the preparation and introduction into the schools of linguistically-oriented teaching materials. In 1970

it was decided that English, attested by a solid examination pass, should be reinstated as a required subject for a preparatory school certificate and for a high school diploma, regardless of which college a student planned to attend. The tendency to deemphasize English has been reversed mainly, though not exclusively, because it has been clearly recognized that English is a valuable tool for learning, that source materials are crucial in successful higher education programs, and that in almost all subjects there are more books and text materials published in English than in any other language.

In considering what might be the outcome in certain sub-Saharan African countries where a local language is likely to be given official status, one is tempted to look to the Egyptian experience for hints of what might transpire. Perhaps this is inadvisable, since there were special conditions in Egypt that are unlikely to be duplicated elsewhere. Perhaps one should be wary of making any predictions, warned by the wisdom of the ancient Chinese proverb that says: "To prophesy is extremely difficult - especially with respect to the future." But there is always a chance for one more reenactment of the Hegelian train of thesis (English as an official language), with a reaction of antithesis (a marked deemphasis of English), followed by synthesis (the reinstatement of English in coexistence with the newly designated official language through a redefinition of roles).

I look to see such a redefinition in the former British colonies of East Africa. Tanzania, as Whiteley has pointed out, is well advanced in the development of Swahili as a national language, and the use of Swahili is aggressively pushed in many areas of national life. Kenya appears to be following the same policy. There have during the past year been official statements by the ruling political party that Kenya will follow suit and formally adopt Swahili as its official language, and a timetable for its diffusion has been announced. Already in Uganda there are strongly voiced suggestions that Uganda too should adopt Swahili as its official tongue.

If, as can be expected, English ceases to be accepted as the preeminent official language of countries like Kenya, Uganda, and later possibly Zambia, there will undoubtedly be changes and adjustments in the roles filled by English and the newly designated national language. The changes may be effected quickly or may evolve over a period of time, depending on local circumstances. What will some of these changes be? The first is likely to be in the school curricula, in the relative roles of English and the official local language. Less English will be required, possibly none at the elementary level, and the local language (or possibly languages) will be pressed into service as medium of instruction. This could have the perhaps unexpected effect of improving English instruction since scarce resources could be assigned to the smaller classes at the higher grades. A retrenchment could also serve the interests of English as an international language of wider communication, since better instruction to fewer students could relieve the pressures that encourage deviant local standards, which in turn tend to make English less serviceable for communication (especially oral communication) across national boundaries. Another possible benefit of a reduced presentation of English in the schools might well be the stimulation of efforts to improve the efficiency with which the language is taught, given the need for better methods and materials to cover the ground in less time and fewer years at higher levels in the school systems. A serious effort to do just this has been made in Egypt.

But outside of the schools, what other changes can be expected? One early modification may be a language switch in government offices, where the business of the state is conducted. The use of an official language for government business is relatively easy to specify and to control. Official documents, correspondence, postage stamps, currency, etc. can be required in the national language. This has been done in Malaysia. Another switch might be the language of the legislature, of legislation and legal proceedings. This latter may come more slowly, since codes and records in English can be converted only by costly and time-consuming translation, and then only if the necessary specialized vocabulary has been developed and accepted.

Another area likely to be affected is radio broadcasting, where the local language(s) can be promoted and English curtailed by government decision. If the area can support a film industry, local languages can be encouraged by requiring theaters to show a certain percentage of local films, as is done in the Philippines. Or foreign films, if the market justifies it, can by requirement be dubbed or presented with subtitles, though this of course is expensive.

Foreigners who cannot speak the local language will be placed at a disadvantage and will find it increasingly difficult to find useful employment. We can expect lots of posturing by public officials who will stress the virtues and importance of the national language and its appropriateness for social and cultural development, though they quietly send their own children abroad or to exclusive private schools to be educated in English. Why? Because English will continue to be very important.

There will always be a continuation of need for extensive competence in a world language. Many educational resources will be available only in English, newsmen will need access to international wire services, anyone in government policy-making positions or anyone with responsibilities in foreign affairs will need English. Any research scholars, university personnel, staff and students, will be severely handicapped without English. Professional people, if they can get an appropriate education at all, will be seriously disadvantaged if they cannot communicate easily with colleagues abroad. Libraries and librarians, entertainment personalities and sponsors, anyone concerned with the growing business of tourism, anyone who aspires to foreign travel. In short, anyone who hopes to rise on the socio-economic ladder or exert leadership in almost any field will need English. Any diminution in the production of English speakers in the schools, if coupled with an enlarged role for the national language, will trigger an immediate increased demand for interpreters and translators, for teacher trainers, for curriculum specialists, for persons with special skills to work with development and technical assistance. The list of those who would find an international language helpful and profitable can be expanded almost indefinitely, and a deemphasis on English in the schools has the effect sooner or later of revealing the importance of the need.

This is why a country that precipitously abandons a world language will likely have second thoughts when the disadvantages of a shortage of linguistic skills begins to be felt. This is why a reaction is likely to suggest a rethinking of a linguistically reduced curriculum, and why countries should move with prudent caution when they plan to modify the

linguistic ecology. This is also why there should be plenty of work on the international scene for well-trained and competent English teachers and educational specialists in the foreseeable future.

As a profession we should be training ourselves to help, when assistance is requested, in the planning of language transitions, particularly in countries where the need of a local official language is strongly felt, and the local linguistic resources make such a decision feasible (i.e., where a local candidate for national language has a fair chance of success). As pointed out above, the demotion of English from a position of preeminence is not necessarily good or bad in itself, and indeed offers chances to improve instruction. The important thing is that decisions should be thoughtfully taken and wisely implemented, with deliberate attention to the knowledge of action, reaction, synthesis, consequences, etc. available from past experience. In this way language policy and language engineering can be made to serve the best national and international interests of the country that is willing and able to provide the best planning available.

NOTES

1. This paper was read at the Fifth Annual Convention of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, New Orleans, March 1971.

2. An idea of the extent of English-language teaching throughout the world can be formed from the citation of a few figures concerning organizations involved in this activity. During 1959 the United States Information Service through its binational institutes and language centers conducted English classes for 339,000 adult students in 54 countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. Another 570,000 secondary-level students were indirectly served through 52 seminar/workshops in 28 countries for 3,800 teachers. The Peace Corps in 1969 had 1,630 volunteers on English-teaching assignments in 33 countries. The Department of Defense employs 60 advisors and coordinators in military English training programs in 20 countries. Other U.S. agencies such as the Agency for International Development, sponsor other programs. Private foundations made development grants to five foreign governments and to individual institutions in six other countries. (Kreidler and Pedtke, 1970, pp. 8-9)

   Many non-English countries maintain very large English language programs. This is of course true where English is the medium of instruction in the schools, as in the Philippines and in many countries of the British Commonwealth. But there are also substantial programs in non-English speaking countries: There are approximately 70,000 teachers of English in the secondary schools of Japan. (Marckwardt, 1963, p. 25) All the secondary school students of Ethiopia, approximately 80,000 study in English.

   Other English-speaking resource countries (particularly Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) have programs of sponsorship or assistance to developing nations. Several countries of northern Europe (Holland, Scandinavia, etc.) are also important sources of English-teaching assistance.

   On the communist side of the ideological fence a similar range of activities in support of English is noted. "In many cities Russian cultural offices compete with British and American centers in advertising English courses." (Barnett, 1964, p. 7) "Within the Soviet Union itself, schools offer English from the fourth or fifth grade on; and in some of the larger cities, it is the one compulsory language in the curriculum." (op. cit., p. 16) Both Russia and Red China beam their propaganda broadcasts in English in an effort to win friends and influence nations in the uncommitted areas of the world.

   The total picture shows a strength for English that is unmatched in history, and it is probable that English will retain its preeminence for a long time into the foreseeable future.

3. In 1852, as quoted in Mackay, 1967, p. 39.

4. As quoted in Mackay, 1967, p. 39.

5. As quoted in Spencer, 1963, p. 30.

6. For a discussion of such a situation in Zambia, see Mwanakatwe, pp. 210-213, passim.

7. Prator, in Fishman, Ferguson and Das Gupta, 1968, p. 469.

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